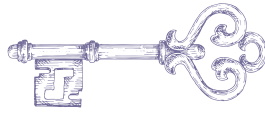


UNLOCK YOUR NOVEL

A Workbook For Getting Unstuck At
Any Drafting Stage



Part I : The Keyring Of Desire



Hello you magnificent creative being with a holy mess of a manuscript that you just know has the potential to be something marvelous:

Greetings from the other side of banging your head against a desk.

This guide is here to help you crack the code of your novel once and for all.

After years of coaching, editing, teaching, and writing, I've identified the keys that will help you unlock your novel when you're most stuck. They stem from my years of work as a trained classical actor and director. Yes, I spell theatre with an "re." :)

The two biggest reasons most of the books that come under my editorial eye are a holy mess are:

- **The writer hasn't figured out how to identify or plot from character desire.** Most craft books talk about desire as though it's one single thing you need to figure out. It's actually THREE distinct desire threads + a misbelief. I call it the "Keyring of Desire."
- **The writer doesn't know how to create or use obstacles in each and every scene in order to maximize tension, suspense, drama, pacing, and continual reader buy-in.**

Unlock Your Novel will help you identify the key mistakes you're making in your work-in-progress and course correct, whether you've just started your book or are in revisions. From exploratory exercises to a chart for use when drafting or revising any scene, you'll have the tools you need to plot emotionally resonant stories where each chapter earns its place. **We're going deep, so roll up your sleeves, Writer!**



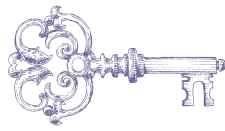
Keep an eye out for this symbol. It means there's an exercise for you to unlock something in your story.

What follows is a Part One of my clear-cut guide to unlocking the portal to a whole new world, where plotting and scene work is great, jazzy, efficient fun. No more feeling stuck and confused and wretched. No more treading water in your pages, lost at sea.

Are you ready to write the book of your dreams? Let's do this thing.



xoxo Heather



PART I: WHAT'S MY MOTIVATION?

A big part of my background is in the theatre: as an actor, director, and producer. Though I've been away from the boards for years, the lessons stay with me each and every day I sit down to write. **You could say I'm a Method Writer. (And you're about to be too.)**

I've found that writers with a theatre background tend to have more ease creating plots that are deeply emotionally resonant and grounded in character desire more easily than other writers because they've been trained to actually become characters, to embody them.

They live and breathe them every night in rehearsal or performance. Most of us American dramatic folk are trained in the Method, a somewhat bastardization of Stanislavsky's Method for actors. We're drilled to embody our characters, doing all kinds of crazy homework to go deeper into their psyche and in every scene we're ALWAYS asking:

What does my character want?

Why does she want it?

Who or what is going to keep them from getting it?

In the work we're doing in Unlock, we're approaching characterization in much the same way an actor would. We're getting into our character's skins. We're imagining the kind of energy they'd be bringing onstage in a scene. We're reacting to what happens around us, rather than passively speaking lines and moving about the stage like a prop. We're really embodying them and their experience. What it feels like to be in their body, walking in their shoes.

Think of your characters as people who "play" a scene. Actively, in the moment. Think of the "top" (beginning) of a scene rather than the "start" of a chapter. The top of a scene is very much embedded in the present. Who's going to walk onstage, what's going to happen on it? We're looking for the same present moment energy and focus that an actor brings onto the stage so that their character is born again night after night.

Basically? We're getting *mindful* about our writing. Be. Here. Now.





Identify Your Protagonist's Keyring of Desire

"Keyring of Desire" has got to be the name of a romance novel, right? **These are the four components needed to plot from character desire, rather than imposing a plot on a character** (which results in cardboard characters and subpar books). You'll get emotionally resonant scenes and a powerful character and plot arc by unlocking your story with the keys on this ring.

KEY ONE: IDENTIFY YOUR PROTAGONIST'S DESPERATE DESIRE

What does your protagonist desperately want? This is the desire your protagonist consciously strives for. They want this thing and they know they want it. But it might not be what they NEED. It might even be terrible for them. This desire is a clear, actionable goal.

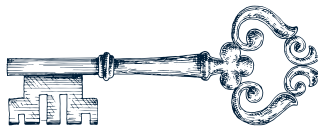
Throughout this workbook, I'll be using Jo March from *Little Women* for my examples (with one goofy exception later on). Spoilers abound!

Example: Jo March desperately wants to be a writer. Being a published writer is her Desperate Desire.

The proto is consciously aware of their Desperate Desire and they are actively trying to achieve it in each and every scene, even in the smallest of ways. We use the word "desperate" for a reason. This has tons of riveting story energy. It's not a "Whatever's Desire."



What is your protagonist's Desperate Desire? This is very often the first thing that comes to mind when someone asks you what your character wants, but you might need to dig deeper. One good strategy is to interview your character (works every time for me). Ask them what they want and write down the answers.



KEY TWO: IDENTIFY YOUR PROTAGONIST'S UNCONSCIOUS NEED

The Unconscious Need is the protagonist's macro desire. It's what the character NEEDS in order to change over the course of the book, but they often don't even know they need it. This is the self-realization they achieve in the climax. **When they realize they need this and they get it: Enlightenment.**

Example: Jo March wants to be a writer (that's her Desperate Desire). But her U.N. is to fully accept herself and stop trying to conform to fit in. Only then will she feel truly in alignment with her fully realized self and get both what she needs and wants.

This is where my writers get really lost. They confuse the Desperate Desire with the Unconscious Need from the outset. *The Unconscious Need gets beneath the Desperate Desire. It's the **real** reason the proto wants the thing they say they want.* No matter how emotionally intelligent your proto is, she can't achieve enlightenment if she already knows how to fix herself.

With the Unlock Process, we identify our character's Desperate Desire AND their Unconscious Need before we go too deep in. Then we go through each scene and identify their objectives for those individual scenes. Each individual scene has its own Desperate Desire for *that scene*. It could be a glass of water or to kill someone.

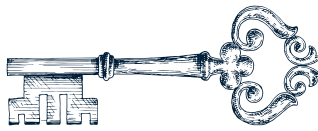
Unconscious Need = Macro Desire for the whole story

Objective = Micro Desires within each scene

The struggle my writers have is that they forget about objectives entirely as they're working through their chapters. They're only thinking about their character's Desperate Desire or Unconscious Need. Problem is, nobody "plays" the Unconscious Need (or even sometimes the Desperate Desire in real life. Which means it's damn near impossible to write a scene in which your character is striving for macro things (love, forgiveness, healing) in a scene in which they're fighting a vampire or buying a cup of coffee. How do you play "I want to love myself" while trying to catch a train?

And then there's the even bigger problem: They're forgetting the protagonist themselves isn't usually aware of their Unconscious Need. So they have nothing to actively, consciously strive for. This is about the point at which my writers get super stuck. Every scene they write falls apart and the book grinds to a halt. Don't worry, we have the keys to unlock this, remember?





So how do you figure out your proto's Unconscious Need? You ask the simplest question of all: WHY?

Unconscious Need: Use The Power Of Why

To get to the heart of what she really wants, keeping asking WHY until there are no more WHYS. Start with the Desperate Desire and go from there.

- Jo wants to be a writer. **Why?**
- Because she lives in her head. **Why?**
- Because she doesn't fit in anywhere else (Misbelief alert!). **Why?**
- Because she's unconventional. Her head is the only place she's accepted for who she is (Misbelief alert!). **Why?**
- People always give her a hard time for being a "tomboy." She feels like she should love Laurie, but doesn't. Her sisters are marrying and she's as lost as ever.
- (We've run out of a need to ask "why" so we now go to Step #2)
- **So what does she NEED in order to experience her highest good, as her highest self?** (I find these self-development terms to be most useful here).
- She needs to fully accept herself in the real world. **Eureka!**
- **UNCONSCIOUS NEED: Jo needs to fully accept herself and stop trying to conform to fit in.** Only when she accepts herself and makes choices from that place (writing *Little Women*, marrying the impoverished professor) will she feel truly in alignment with her fully realized self and get both what she needs and wants.

In order for the protagonist to achieve their self-actualization they have to WANT what they need. **Nobody can make them see the light.** Wisdom is obtained on one's own, no matter how many people help you along the way. They'll have to actively make choices to obtain their Unconscious Need once it becomes conscious near the end of the novel.

The Unconscious Need will be achieved when the proto's misbelief disintegrates in the climax. Enlightenment: "You can't always get what you want / But if you try sometime you find / You get what you need."





Use the Power of **Why** to discover your proto's Unconscious Need.

- Ask someone to sit across from you and keep asking WHY, or do this exercise out loud. This works best as stream-of-consciousness. You can refine later as needed.

"[Character's name] wants [their Desperate Desire]."

Why?

"Because...."

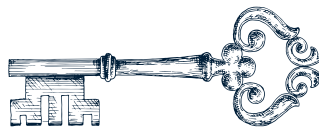
Why?

"Because..."

(Keep going like this until there are no more "Why's")

So what do they NEED in order to experience their highest good, as her highest self?

Answer = Unconscious Need



KEY THREE: IDENTIFY YOUR PROTAGONIST'S MISBELIEF:

Misbelief: Your proto has a belief about herself or the world that isn't true, but this belief runs her and causes her to not act in her self interest. It's an unhelpful story she tells herself. When Misbelief is triggered the proto is usually moving away from her Desperate Desire, but toward Enlightenment (Unconscious Need Unlocked). OR, she's moving toward her Desperate Desire, only to realize it's not what she really wants, once she gets it (also Enlightenment).

Example: Jo believes that she's a misfit and, as such, she'll never find happiness. Because of this, she writes stories she doesn't care about, rejects the professor she loves, and works a day job she hates (caring for Aunt March) so she won't be a spinster burden on her family and can hopefully still be a writer.

Drama, tension, and suspense all come from the friction between the proto's U.N. and the Misbelief your proto has about herself or the world that isn't true, but runs her and causes her to not act in her self interest.

The friction between your protagonist's Unconscious Need and Misbelief is what you need when you're lacking zest, momentum, and drama. (I will defer to Lisa Cron's *Story Genius*, which gives a great overview of this desire + Misbelief equation. She calls it the Third Rail because it is. Killer. Check out her book to go deeper with this concept.)

In essence, you're looking to trigger your protagonist. Every time her Misbelief comes up against what some deep, unknown part of her knows she needs, she gets triggered AF and then acts out. The acting out is the story / plot gift that keeps on giving. Why does she act out? Because she'd have to change, or lose something, get out of her comfort zone...and all of that is really scary and has consequences.

At some point near the end, she'll realize that she MUST overcome this misbelief and then she will achieve her U.N. (Enlightenment!).

Example: Jo longs to accept herself for who she is and stop fighting her non-conformity. Only then will she heal the loneliness and uncertainty wounds inside her. But she doesn't know that, because that's her Unconscious Need.

What she knows she wants (Desperate Desire) is to be a writer. But she's got this Misbelief running her, which is that she's a misfit who will never belong anywhere with anyone outside her family and thus she will never find her place in the world, or true happiness. Society tells her this too, with the concept of marriage as the true ideal.

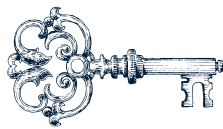
Trigger: She's sweet on Professor Bhaer, but when he says he doesn't love her book (her Desperate Desire is to be a writer, remember), it triggers that Misbelief (she's a misfit who can't do anything right). The result: plot! She runs off before he can confess his feelings. Will they get together? Or is it too late??

Unconscious Need + Desperate Desire x Misbelief = DRAMA!



Answer the following questions to identify your proto's Misbelief (she'll have more than one, but you want a main one to work with throughout the whole book). Again, huge thanks to Lisa Cron for making this concept so clear in *Story Genius*.

- **What are the stories your proto is telling themselves that aren't true?** Do they think no one loves them? That they're invisible? That they're a talentless hack? (Hint: What are the stories YOU tell yourself? Notice how they run you, as well, and you'll get a lot closer to understanding misbelief).
- **Why does your proto believe these stories?** Did someone say something to them, was there a defining moment they replay over and over, or is this a rule society has that works against their self interest?
- **How is your proto already being triggered in your story?** What are some other ways they might be triggered?



KEY FOUR: UNLOCKING THE OBJECTIVE

Objective: The Objective is the micro desire for EACH specific scene. In this way, each chapter has focus and momentum, with an active character consciously striving for something tangible they want in the scene that will help them achieve their Desperate Desire. **Utilizing the objective is the quickest fix you'll find for writing great scenes and chapters.**

Example: Jo doesn't tell Aunt March to sod off when she insults her because Jo wants her inheritance. So in that scene, ALL she's focused on is staying in her aunt's good graces. She uses strategies to keep her lips zipped. She fibs. She tamps down her annoyance. (Later, when Amy gets to go to Europe instead = DRAMA!)

Is the character consciously aware of their objective in the scene? YES.

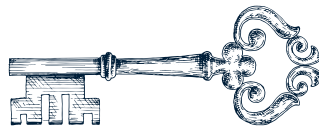
Are they consciously connecting the objective to their Desperate Want? SOMETIMES, but not ALWAYS.

For a long time, I focused on teaching my clients and students to plot from a single character desire and Misbelief (as I do), but most of them kept getting tripped up. **They struggled to identify character desire or they couldn't figure out how to use desire as a springboard for plot. WHY IS THIS SO HARD FOR ME? WHY CAN'T I FIGURE IT OUT?** There were lots of tears of frustration and I couldn't figure out why because it felt so clear to me.

And then I realized: If they didn't have a background in actor training, as I had, they weren't used to getting in a character's skin and plotting how a character made decisions in a scene based on clear objectives in the present moment, where one choice begets the next. **In a sense, they weren't being mindful, living in the present of each scene as their characters - they were too focused on the macro, playing God and planning their proto's future.**

Which meant my writers' scenes weren't working, they had no momentum, no point, things were just randomly happening - no matter how clear they were on their character's Desperate Desire or Unconscious Need.

In the theatre, we say "acting is reacting." Something happens, a character reacts, and we're off to the races. My writers were getting so caught up trying to plot from a character's macro desire that they were losing sight of the protagonist herself as the poor gal's story was trying to play out. They weren't reacting in scenes, just monologuing with their own agenda while the rest of the cast looked on, lost.



Let Objectives Do Your Heavy Plot Lifting

Your proto can't play an Unconscious Need (and often can't even play her conscious Desperate Desire) because usually no one consciously acts out of a macro desire.

This is why plotting from character desire can get confusing! How could Jo play "I want to fully accept myself." Like, what does that even look like? **When a character plays a specific objective in a scene she is getting closer or further away from achieving her Desperate Desire...whether she realizes it or not.**

This is important because each step toward or away from her Desperate Desire is always moving her forward through her arc toward her Unconscious Need.

Take this example:

Jo is polite to Aunt March because she wants to stay on Aunt March's good side. Why? Her objective in the scene is to stay in Aunt March's good graces so she will give Jo the inheritance. If Jo gives in to her dislike of her aunt and it shows, she won't get the moolah.

Watching Jo do this delicate dance is also engaging, because it's exciting to watch someone actively striving for a desire. (Think *American Ninja Warrior*). Remember, Jo's Desperate Desire is to be a writer. If she stays on Aunt March's good side, then she's been promised an inheritance. And if she has money, then she can write as much as she wants, even if it pays crap. And if she winds up a spinster like she fears she will be (misbelief activated!), at least she won't be a burden on her family.

So in this scene, Louisa May Alcott isn't having Jo think "I want to fully accept myself" and yet, look: she's moving Jo through her arc toward her Enlightenment, which will happen in the climax. Jo will finally get so tired of the pretending (just like she is here) and realize that the pretending / conforming is going to cost her something her non-conformity wants to give her: true love and a kickass publishing deal.

Jo will achieve her U.N. (accepting her misfit nature) when she stops trying to do things she "should" (such as work for her aunt because society tells her as an unmarried woman she's going to be a burden and needs to make money through inheritance rather than writing) and instead embrace what she NEEDS. And that need is her Unconscious Need that she's unaware of until the end of the novel:

Jo must accept herself as she is and give herself permission to live an unconventional life in order to find true happiness as an unconventional woman who chooses writing and poverty in the pursuit of love and joy, damn whatever society has to say about it.

Bonus: She STILL gets published and she gets the boy. But that's all just icing on the cake. Because the real score is living out of her highest good for her highest self.



Take a look at your first chapter and explore what your protagonist's Objective is in the scene. In this scene alone, what do they want and why do they want it?



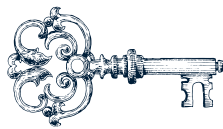
Does their Objective change as new things happen in the scene?



What strategies do they employ to get what they wants? How do they pivot? (For example: Maybe they try to lie and that doesn't work, so then they try sweet talking.)

Play each scene / chapter's Objective (micro desire for the scene). Don't worry about the Unconscious Need. (We'll talk about integration in a bit). Have your proto go for something specific in that scene related to her conscious Desperate Desire.

You'll know you've got it right if the scene moves your character closer to their Desperate Desire or away from it. Either is fine - there just needs to be MOVEMENT.



PART 2

UNLOCKING OBSTACLES

Obstacle: The person, thing, or the protagonist's own Misbelief that is getting in the way of her achieving what she wants in a scene. A good scene has several Obstacles, some internal and some external.

Example: Jo and Professor Bhaer are getting close, but then - obstacle - he tells her the story she wrote isn't working. Then - obstacle - she believes her own misbelief, that no one gets her. She leaves in a huff. He wants to make amends but - obstacle - she gets word her sister is sick and leaves the city.

This is the second biggest issue I see in the manuscripts I work on: Even if the writer has nailed down character desire, they're not quite sure how to go about writing compelling chapters that keep the pot simmering. What results is passive characters with no agency, unclear desires and motives, and a plot that's as rambling as drunken walk through Paris at night.

In contrast, many writers who have no experience of getting in another's skin in such an intentional way might find themselves imposing a plot on a character and treating them like their own personal puppet. (The concept of getting in your character's skin and using exploratory side writing to do so--ideally BEFORE you go headlong into drafting---is a really huge part of my own process, which I'll get into in future Unlock installments).

Whether you consider yourself a character-based writer or plot-focused scribe, the vast majority of struggles I see in the manuscripts I edit is a distinct lack of emotionally resonant character desire and clear Obstacles.

Energy: The energy the character brings into the scene. Identify what happened just before the scene and how it affects their mindset and energy as they go into it. This is a game changer! It gives you a specific emotional place to start your scene. **Energy + a clear Objective = chapter gold.**

It doesn't matter if she gets what she wants. What matters is the trying. The trying is where all the energy, momentum, suspense, and tension comes in.

In the theatre, **the trying is the specific action the character takes to get what they want in that moment.**

Conflict is the root of all drama!!!! When you want something and someone or fate or a big baddie or nature keeps you from getting it? DRAMA! And drama is what all stories—comedies or tragedies—are about.



Take a look at that first chapter again. What are the obstacles that are standing in the way of your proto getting what they want in the scene? In other words, how are these obstacles getting in the way of their Objective?



Are any of these obstacles related to their Misbelief? How are they being triggered through these obstacles?



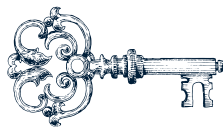
What strategies do they employ to overcome the obstacle? Do they pivot? Change tactics?



What specific actions do they take as they move through the scene to get what they want? How do they think these actions will help them achieve their goal?



Does their objective change because of the obstacle, or do they plow through? What does this choice teach us about their character? Does it make them stubborn or wise, brave or cowardly?



DESIRE KEYRING + OBSTACLES IN ACTION

Analysis of an Activity

This is classic Method homework, tweaked for our purposes. I just made this whole scenario up to illustrate the point. It's a bit goofy, but I had fun with it.

Activity: An actor, Jack, is standing in an audition line.

Desperate Desire: Fame. Jack wants the EGOT situation like nobody's business.

UNCONSCIOUS NEED: To feel like his life on this planet matters. To feel like he made a mark. *Wait for it...* To feel like HE'S NOT THROWING AWAY HIS SHOT.

MISBELIEF: Jack doesn't have what it takes to achieve his dreams. (For one, his terrible memory is going to keep him from ever "making it." What kind of an actor can't memorize lines?!)

The Scene:

OBJECTIVE he's going into the scene with: Jack wants to be cast as the lead, as Hamilton. He is NOT going to forget his lines, dammit. He's dying to play Hamilton and nothing is going to keep him from that role, especially his terrible memory.

Energy: Just before the scene, he got lost because of his bad memory: He couldn't remember where the theatre was and got really turned around. So he's feeling pretty anxious and trying to get in the zone.

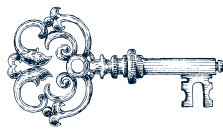
Action: Waiting in an audition line for *Hamilton*.

- Jack's going to use this time to make sure he's memorized his lines and has his song prepared. Preparing mentally to audition. He needs to rock the hell out of *My Shot*. Not texting with his friends or taking selfies, like these other rookie actors he's in line with. He's getting this part!! (*Desperate Desire*)

OBSTACLE: Oh no! The stage manager says the director will only see three more actors...and Jack's fifth in line.

OBJECTIVE: To get in front of that director come hell or high water.

ACTION: Cutting in line so he can get through the door. Jack lies. He says the director is his third cousin. He says the director personally said to come to this audition. He does whatever he has to do to get backstage. They let him through, but probably only because the stage manager thinks he's cute.



Analysis of an Activity Continued...

Action: Slipping the stage manager some cash so he can get a sense of why the director rejected the actors before him. Jack learns something horrifying...

OBSTACLE: The director is suddenly asking people to do a Shakespearean monologue. WTF?! He can't remember his Hamlet or Romeo. (Misbelief is triggered!) The stage manager says the director likes people who takes risks, though. Hmmm...

OBJECTIVE: Figure out what he's going to perform in the next few minutes.

ACTION: Jack can't remember his Romeo (*"but soft, what light through yonder window breaks...something something, arise fair maiden and...oh god"*), but he totally remembers Radiohead's Talk Show Host, which plays when we first meet Romeo in Baz Luhrman's Romeo and Juliet, which means it's technically Shakespeare, like in an alternate universe, so Jack decides to go for it.

OBJECTIVE: Get the director to fall in love with his unusual interpretation of the words "Shakespearean monologue."

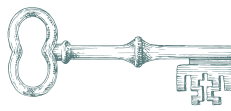
ACTION: Jack stands on the edge of the stage and is all, "I'll be doing Romeo and Juliet, Act One, Romeo and Benvolio" and launches into his best Thom Yorke meets Romeo Montague. And, because it's Hamilton, *he raps it*. Result? Our actor gets the motherloving part based on the kind of cleverness Alexander Hamilton himself would have high-fived him for. **There's only one problem:** Um. Now he has to memorize one of the most complicated lyrical roles on Broadway.

OBJECTIVE: Find a memorization hack ASAP so he doesn't blow the biggest chance he has of breaking out in his life.

And.....SCENE.

ABC: Always Be Closing. For us novelists, this means we **end every scene with a clear objective!** This objective is your writing prompt for your next chapter.

This way, you're setting yourself up handsomely for the next chapter and you're ensuring reader buy-in. Your reader has a sense of what's to come and they're eager to see how it plays out. **DON'T SKIP THIS STEP. This is my #1 fix for all of you writers out there who struggle with chapter endings.**



Analysis: How This One Scene Leads To The Unconscious Need Being Unlocked

See how in playing the objective, Jack's also moving both his Desperate Desire forward, as well as his Unconscious Need?

Check it out: Being discovered by an important director and getting the lead as Hamilton on Broadway will allow him to be discovered by future directors who see him in the performances which will lead to more work and eventually lead to becoming a famous actor in movies or the next fancy Netflix drama. Maybe Lin Manuel himself will use him for something! (**Desperate Desire unlocked!**)

But in order to get his true desire to make a lasting mark on the world (Unconscious Need), our actor is going to have to realize that fame ain't all it's cracked up to be, and what will happen is he'll find his desire isn't to be famous at all, but to leave a mark on the world by making it a better place. Because our story is kickass and dramatic and needs tissues, Joe REALLY leaves his mark in a way he never could have predicted, which is that his failed memory leads to a really embarrassing moment in which he blanks out BAD on opening night when the *Times reviewer is there*, which gets him fired, which leads to him going through several obstacles that allow him to see a superpower in his bad memory (he can bounce back easily from failure because he can't remember it!), thus overcoming his misbelief by turning it into self-development guru gold: "How to overcome your own personal obstacles and still thrive." He's an inspiration to millions, unexpectedly famous but NOT for his acting, and famous in a way that changes lives (**Unconscious Need unlocked!**). This will ultimately be more emotionally resonant and powerful than an EGOT.

But what gave this scene focus and energy, with high stakes and drama?

The OBSTACLES that were getting in the way of our actor having a shot at the big time. Did you notice how many times his objective had to shift, getting more and more micro? Sure, he wanted the part, but he had to shift his objective a little bit each time in order to stay in play. **Simply wanting the part isn't something you can play. Cutting in line to get through a door that will lead you closer to the part is.** Notice how those obstacles ratcheted up an already tense scene. (**Pacing!**) Notice how our protagonist got closer in his arc to his ultimate goal (making his mark on the world, not throwing away his shot / **Enlightenment!**). And notice how clear it was for us, as the readers, what he wanted, which made it easy for us to root and fear for him (**reader buy-in!**). We couldn't stop turning pages if you pointed a gun at us, not until we knew whether he'd get the part or not. Plus, we're worried about his bad memory (**Misbelief!**), and we know how desperately he wants this, and what the odds are.

We love watching people who have skin in the game going for something they want.

So, remember, PLAY THE OBJECTIVE!



Go back through and see for yourself what would have happened if Jack only tried to play the Unconscious Need. (How do you play “I want to make a mark on the world?” That’s way harder than, “I want this motherloving part.”). Actually write down ways you as a writer would attempt that, and see how tough it would be to play the Unconscious Need as opposed to the Objective.



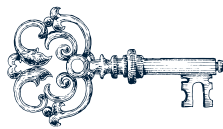
How was Jack able to pivot as new info came forward? What are other possible obstacles he could have encountered that would have triggered his Misbelief or brought closer to / further away from his Desperate Desire?



Take another look at your own chapter. By the end, has your proto moved closer to or further away from their Desperate Desire? (Either one is fine, but there has to be movement).



Does your chapter end with an objective, a clear call to action for the proto that acts as your writing prompt for the next chapter?



TROUBLESHOOTING

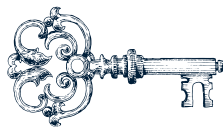


Problem: Nothing "happens" in my scene. We're still treading water.

- **First, did you identify what happened in the scene just before this one?** What's the energy they're bringing into this scene you're writing? What's their mindset?
- **What does your proto want in this particular scene (their Objective they come into the scene with)?** A kiss? A piece of bread? An answer? The reason nothing is happening is because their objective isn't clear or compelling enough.
- **Who or what is trying to keep them from getting what they want?**
- **How do they need to adjust their strategies** throughout the scene to try to get what they want?
- **Have you identified what specific actions** they'll be taking to overcome the obstacles standing in the way of what they want?
- **Did you end the last chapter with a clear objective?** If not, then that's why you're stuck! Go back to your last chapter and figure out objective it ends with. That's your prompt for your next chapter.

Problem: I don't know what she wants in this scene.

- **What happened in your proto's life just before this scene?** This will help you determine what energy they're bringing into the scene. Did they just have a long hot run and want to be left alone so they can take a shower? (Then: They want a shower). Did they just bump into their husband's lover? (They want to be alone.) Their objective is hiding in there. Even if it's simple, the obstacles will quickly complicate things. Imagine the drama that results from a cold shower because the hot water isn't working...due to your neighbor's construction project.
- **As above, did you end the last chapter with a clear objective?** If not, then that's why you're stuck! Go back to your last chapter and figure out objective it ends with. That's your prompt for your next chapter.
- **Check back in with your proto's Desperate Desire.** What will they try to do in this scene to get closer to it? By the end, they MUST be closer or further from their Desperate Desire for the chapter to earn its place in the story.
- **Check in with your proto's Misbelief.** What could happen in this chapter that would trigger their Misbelief? Remember, every time her Misbelief is triggered, you're basically breaking them down so that when the climax comes at the end of the book, they're ready for Enlightenment. When Misbelief is triggered they're usually moving away from their Desperate Desire, but toward Enlightenment (Unconscious Need). OR, moving toward their Desperate Desire, only to realize it's not what they really want, once they get it (also Enlightenment).
- **Reconsider the Unconscious Need:** This plane will not take off if you don't have * the * Unconscious Need that is born from your proto's heart. See if the Unconscious Need you chose really is the right one. It can be helpful to think of what their "wound" is. Do some side writing to explore.



THE KEY TO ENLIGHTENMENT

SO WHAT ARE WE DOING THIS WHOLE TIME ABOUT THE Unconscious Need?

I've been telling you throughout not to think or worry about the Unconscious Need (once you've identified it). But, of course, our whole GOAL is to move your proto through her arc in order to achieve it. What the what, Heather?

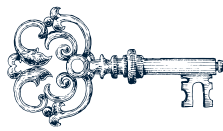
While you're working on a chapter, thinking about the U.N. is basically like being a victim of anti-mindfulness psych ops. It gets in your head, confuses the hell out of you, and makes you lose sight of the scene itself because you aren't being mindful and present in the scene: you're thinking about the future. About the climax. Now, of course, you're the creator of this story you do need to be thinking about the future...but NOT while you're writing a chapter or scene.

When you're writing a scene, you must be in the present. Be here now. (This is where I put on my meditation teacher cap). Hit all the marks:

- Identify the energy the proto brings into the scene from what JUST happened the moment before.
- Create a clear objective at the top of the scene that was carried over from the objective at the end of the previous scene (a strategy to achieve the Desperate Desire).
- Create obstacles (internal and external) that drive the scene.
- Trigger Misbelief with at least one of the obstacles.
- Have the proto develop and enact a clear strategy with specific actions for overcoming the obstacles.
- Move the proto either closer to or further away from her Desperate Desire by the end of the chapter.
- Create one last obstacle at the end of the chapter that acts as a writing prompt for the next chapter(s). This obstacle will drive the next part of the story / plot even if it's not the objective your proto goes into the next scene with. (Have the next scene at least move them one step closer or further away from achieving this Objective you've dangled at the end of the chapter).

When You've Finished the Chapter But BEFORE you move onto the next chapter, do an Enlightenment Check-In. Remember, "Enlightenment" happens in the climax, the moment when the proto's Misbelief disintegrates in the face of her realizing what she truly needs in order to access her highest self for her highest good. This need is the Unconscious Need. It is likely the first time the proto is consciously aware of the Unconscious Need. In the climax, she will likely have to sacrifice something or make a big change or face something scary internally or externally in order to unlock her Unconscious Need and be conscious of it and CHOOSE to accept / fight for her true desire. **Every scene in your book is a step toward Enlightenment. Everything in your book is spiritually preparing your protagonist for self-actualization.** This is the same in real life too, by the way.





UNLOCKING ENLIGHTENMENT

The Enlightenment Check-In: Answer the following questions with your first chapter. Do this after finishing each chapter, but ONLY after you have a strong draft of that chapter and are ready to move on to the next one.



What is your proto's Unconscious Need?



What is going to happen at the climax that will force them to finally be conscious of their Unconscious Need and fight for it?



What is your proto's Misbelief?



What happened in this scene that triggered their Misbelief?



How is this specific triggering experience spiritually preparing them for the change they will make at the end of the book?



Are they closer to or further away from their Desperate Desire at the end of this chapter?



State in one sentence how your proto is now one step closer to their Enlightenment by the end of this chapter.



EXAMPLE: UNLOCKING ENLIGHTENMENT

The Enlightenment Check-In: I'm using Jo March from *Little Women*, the scene in which she tells Laurie she can't marry him.



What is your proto's Unconscious Need? To fully accept herself and stop trying to conform to fit in.



What is going to happen at the climax that will force them to finally be conscious of their Unconscious Need and fight for it? Professor Bhaer will come to her family's house after she left him without saying goodbye on the same day that her sister, Amy, comes home with her new husband, Laurie - the very same Laurie that Jo refuses to marry in this chapter. When the Professor is walking away from her after his visit (which triggers the climax), Jo has a choice: she can go after him, rejecting the conformity her sister has chosen and instead marry a poor man, or she can stay at home, doomed to unhappiness.



What is your proto's Misbelief? She's a misfit. She doesn't fit in anywhere in society. Her own imagination is the only place she belongs.



What happened in this scene that triggered their Misbelief? When Laurie confesses his love and Jo refuses him (because she doesn't love him), it confirms her Misbelief, that she's a hopeless misfit who will never fit in in society. In her eyes, he's perfect and she's an idiot for refusing him. This severely triggers her. In order to get away from her despair and anything that reminds her of him and her own failure to human, she moves to the big city to be a writer and embrace spinsterdom...and this is where she meets her true love.



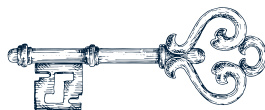
How is this specific triggering experience spiritually preparing them for the change they will make at the end of the book? In refusing Laurie, Jo is actively choosing her misfitness, despite wishing she could conform. She hasn't EMBRACED being a misfit, but she's one step closer to accepting herself for who she is, and making choices based on who she is, not who she wishes she were. Professor Bhaer and Laurie act as catalysts throughout the book that force Jo to have a hard look at herself. Each time, she gets closer to despair, which is spiritually preparing her for the wisdom she'll need to become Enlightened and have self-actualization.



Are they closer to or further away from their Desperate Desire at the end of this chapter? Her Desperate Desire is to be a writer and she's closer to it because in fleeing Laurie, she goes to the big city to try to become a professional authoress.



State in one sentence how your proto is now one step closer to their Enlightenment by the end of this chapter. In refusing Laurie, and thus refusing to do what everyone expects of her (to marry him, and marry well), Jo is moving closer to embracing her misfitness and accepting herself for who she is, no longer needing to or choosing to conform.



THE FINAL KEY: BUILDING THE WRITING LIFE YOU LONG FOR

On the next page, you'll find a handy quick guide to unlocking any scene using all the methods in this workbook. Print it out and keep it nearby. It's a great reference to make sure you're hitting all the necessary points we've discussed. There's also a glossary of helpful terms for quick reference.

You'll also find links to my resources to help support your book and your writing practice.

Nothing in here is going to help you very much if you haven't built a sustainable writing practice and a lifestyle and mindset that supports your creativity. If your well is dry, if you have no flow or focus, and if you don't know how to set boundaries around your creativity or have tools to navigate the ups and downs of the writing life (fear, rejection, the Inner Critic, comparison, etc.), then your book can only go so far.



So here's a final exercise for you:

- What is YOUR Desperate Desire?
- What is YOUR Unconscious Need?
- What is YOUR Misbelief?
- What is your Objective right in this moment in terms of your book and/or writing life?
- What are the obstacles holding you back from the writing life you long for?
- What strategies and specific actions will you take to overcome them?
- Do an Enlightenment Check-In on yourself. Are you getting closer?

If you find yourself feeling stuck on your story, don't panic. Remember, you have the keys to the story kingdom. Just go through the Keyring of Desire, use the prompts, and keep digging until you find what feels right for your story. And don't forget that I have LOADS of support for you on my website.

Here's to Unlocking-

Heather





HELPFUL TERMS

Some of these terms may be familiar to you and a few are adapted from the Stanislavsky acting Method. (Guess what? You're a Method Writer now!) May they be of use as you Unlock.

Desperate Desire: The desire your protagonist consciously strives for. They desperately want this thing and they *know* they want it. But it might not be what they NEED. It might even be terrible for them. This desire is a clear, actionable goal.

- Example: Jo March wants to be a writer. Being a published writer is her Desperate Desire.

Unconscious Need: This is the protagonist's macro desire. It's what the character NEEDS in order to change over the course of the book, but they often don't even know they need it. This is the self-realization they achieve in the climax.

- Example: Jo March wants to be a writer (that's her Desperate Desire). But her U.N. is to fully accept herself and stop trying to conform to fit in. Only when she accepts herself and makes choices from *that* place (writing *Little Women*, marrying an impoverished professor) will she feel truly in alignment with her fully realized self and get both what she needs and wants.

Objective: The Objective is the micro desire for EACH specific scene. A scene might have several objectives as it progresses. In this way, each chapter has focus and momentum, with an active character consciously striving for something tangible they want in the scene that will help them achieve their Desperate Desire.

- Example: Jo doesn't tell Aunt March to sod off when she insults her because Jo wants her inheritance. So in that scene, ALL she's focused on is staying in her aunt's good graces.

Misbelief: Your proto has a belief about herself or the world that isn't true, but this belief runs her and causes her to not act in her self interest. It's an unhelpful story she tells herself. It's a limiting belief. Basically, she needs a mindset re-set.

- Example: Jo believes that she's a misfit and, as such, she'll never find happiness. Because of this, she writes stories she doesn't care about in order to be accepted in publishing, rejects the professor she loves because she feels unworthy, and works a day job she hates (caring for Aunt March) so she won't be a spinster burden on her family because obviously no one will marry her.

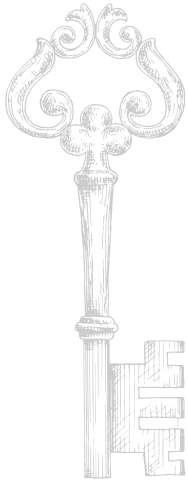
Obstacle: The person, thing, or the protagonist's own Misbelief that is getting in the way of her achieving what she wants in a scene. A good scene has several obstacles, some internal and some external.

- Example: Jo and Professor Bhaer are getting close, but then - obstacle - he tells her the story she wrote isn't working. Then - obstacle - she believes her own Misbelief, that she's a misfit and no one gets her. She leaves in a huff. He wants to make amends but - obstacle - she gets word her sister is sick and leaves the city.

Energy: The energy the character brings into the scene. Identify what happened just before the scene and how it affects their mindset and energy as they go into it. This is a game changer! It gives you a specific emotional place to start your scene.

Enlightenment: I prefer this term for the self-realization the protagonist has in the climax. I think it most accurately describes the moment in the climax when the protagonist's misbelief dissolves and they finally realize what they NEED (Unconscious Need) and get it. (Or not. But that's rare for stories).

UNLOCK YOUR SCENE



YOUR KEYS

The items below are for your tracking purposes. They will be the same for every chapter until your proto's Enlightenment.

WHAT IS YOUR PROTO'S
DESPERATE DESIRE?

WHAT IS THEIR
UNCONSCIOUS NEED?

WHAT IS THEIR MISBELIEF?

1

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE
MOMENT JUST BEFORE
THIS SCENE?

WHAT ENERGY DOES YOUR
PROTAGONIST BRING INTO
THE SCENE BECAUSE OF
THIS?



2

WHAT IS THEIR OBJECTIVE IN
THE SCENE?

WHY DOES YOUR PROTO THINK
THIS WILL HELP THEM GET CLOSER
TO ACHIEVING THEIR DESPERATE
DESIRE?

DOES THE OBJECTIVE CHANGE
IN SCENE? (IT DOESN'T HAVE
TO ALL THE TIME)



3

WHAT / WHO ARE THE OBSTACLES
THAT KEEP YOUR PROTO FROM
GETTING WHAT THEY WANT?

WHAT STRATEGIES WILL YOUR PROTO USE
IN THE SCENE TO OVERCOME THESE
OBSTACLES?

WHAT ARE THE SPECIFIC ACTIONS YOUR
PROTO WILL TAKE TO OVERCOME THE
OBSTACLES?



4

IS YOUR PROTO EITHER
CLOSER OR FURTHER
AWAY FROM THEIR
DESPERATE DESIRE BY
THE END OF THE SCENE?

DID YOU END THE SCENE
WITH A CLEAR
OBJECTIVE? (THIS IS
YOUR WRITING PROMPT
FOR THE NEXT
CHAPTER/SCENE.)

TRACK THEIR
ENLIGHTENMENT: CHECK
IN WITH THE
UNCONSCIOUS NEED AND
SEE IF THEY ARE ONE STEP
CLOSER AFTER THIS
SCENE TO BEING
SPIRITUALLY PREPARED
FOR THE CHANGE THEY
WILL MAKE.



Below are just a few ways we can work one-on-one to unlock your story and writing practice

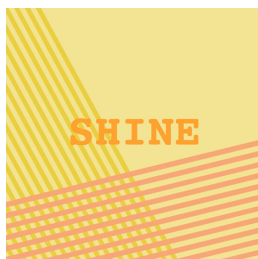


Unlock At:

www.heatherdemetrios.com/current-offerings



Go deeper into the Unlock Process with one-on-one coaching & receive curated worksheets and craft counseling.



Full Manuscript Critique and Coaching



Partial Manuscript Critique and Coaching

Unlock At:



www.heatherdemetrios.com/current-offerings



Are you looking for a writing coach to help you on your journey?

Let's Connect



heatherdemetrios.com



Downloads,
Resources,
and
Inspiration



support@heatherdemetrios.com



@HDemetrios

Looking for community?

Find out more at:

www.heatherdemetrios.com/thewell



@heatherdemetrios



Heather Demetrios is a critically acclaimed author, writing coach, editor, and teacher. Her books include *Little Universes*, *I'll Meet You There*, and *Bad Romance*. Thousands of writers meditate with Heather on her Mindfulness For Writers Insight Timer page. She lives in Durham, North Carolina with her husband, Zach, and cat, Circe.

All materials © Heather
Demetrios / Pneuma

Creative, LLC :: For personal use
only. Please do not share or
distribute.



**5% of every dollar writers spend working
with me go to Water.org.
// We flow, they flow. //**

Learn more at

www.heatherdemetrios.com/water